

COVID-19 Lockdown Potentially Contributing to a Decrease in Seismic Noise

In light of the current pandemic, human activity and a large portion of transportation have been shut down. New research, from experts who study Earth's movements, has indicated that shutdowns have resulted in a significant drop in seismic activity.

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Campo Dei Fiori Square is seen empty on March 10, 2020 in Rome, Italy Campo Marco Di Lauro/Getty Images

Data from a seismometer at the observatory show that measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Brussels caused human-induced seismic noise to fall by about one-third"

Thomas Lecocq, seismologist, the Royal Observatory of Belgium

Seismic noise is the hum of vibrations within Earth's crust. Earthquakes cause the Earth's crust to vibrate, but on a day to day basis vehicles and industrial machines also add to vibrations. These day to day vibrations create background noise which can impair seismologists' ability to detect other signals that occur at the same frequency. A decrease in seismic noise could allow detectors to recognize smaller earthquakes and increase efforts to monitor other seismic events such as volcanic activity.

If lockdowns continue in the coming months, city-based detectors around the world might be better than usual at detecting the locations of earthquake aftershocks"

Andy Frassetto, a seismologist at the Incorporated Research Institutions for Seismology in Washington DC

This research comes from Brussels and similar changes have been found in a station in Los Angeles. It's estimated that not every monitoring station will see a significant difference in activity. Certain stations are located in remote areas to avoid human vibrations.

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Sources:

- *Coronavirus Lockdowns Have Changed the Way Earth Moves- Scientific American*